

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-24 (Canceled).

25. (Currently amended) A method for securing two or more suture strands together, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one fastening element comprised of a shape-recovery material, wherein the element is in a tensioned position for engaging the suture strands while allowing sliding of the element relative to the suture strands, and wherein the element comprises a coil where each turn of the coil includes two or more suture retention loops;

engaging the suture strands with the element, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning the suture strands along a path through at least a portion of the element, and wherein positioning includes positioning the suture strands through two or more suture retention loops; and

transitioning the element to a relaxed shape-recovery position wherein the strands are in a fixed position relative to the element or to each other.

Claim 26 (Canceled).

27. (Currently amended) A method as in claim 25 [[26]], wherein the engaging step comprises positioning a first suture strand along a first path and a second suture strand along a second path which differs from the first path.

Claim 28 (Canceled).

29. (Currently amended) A method as in claim 25 [[28]], wherein the suture retention loops of each coil turn are disposed in diametrical opposition when the element is in the relaxed shape-recovery position, and the positioning step includes positioning the suture strands

through successive suture retention loops so that the strands follow a tortuous [[tortutous]] path when the element is in the relaxed shape-recovery position.

30. (Original) A method as in claim 25, wherein the providing step comprises loading the element on a loading tool.

31. (Original) A method as in claim 25, wherein the providing step comprises providing the element loaded on or within a loading tool.

32. (Original) A method as in claim 30 or 31, wherein the transitioning step comprises releasing the element from the loading tool.

Claims 33-37 (Canceled).

38. (Original) A method as in claim 25, further comprising sliding the element along the suture strands to a desired position prior to the transitioning step.

39. (Original) A method as in claim 25, further comprising adjusting the position of the element along the suture strands after the transitioning step.

40. (Original) A method as in claim 39, wherein the adjusting step comprises: transitioning the element to the tensioned position; and moving the element in relation to the suture strands.

41. (Currently amended) A system for adjustably holding one or more suture strands comprising:

at least one fastening element comprised of a shape-recovery material, wherein the element has a tensioned position for engaging the suture strands while allowing sliding of the element relative to the suture strands and a relaxed shape-recovery position for holding the strands in a fixed position relative to the element or to each other;

at least one suture strand which is engageable by the element; and

a loading tool having a proximal end, a distal end and a lumen therethrough, wherein the element is loadable on the loading tool.

42. (Original) A system as in claim 41, wherein the loading tool further comprises a shaft near the distal end.

43. (Original) A system as in claim 42, wherein the element comprises a coil which is mountable on the shaft.

44. (Original) A system as in claim 43, wherein each turn of the coil includes at least one suture retention loop and wherein the coil is loadable on the loading tool by inserting the shaft through at least one of the suture retention loops.

Claim 45 (Canceled).

46. (Currently amended) A system as in claim 41 [[45]], wherein the loading tool further comprises a shaft near the distal end which houses at least a portion of the lumen through which the suture strand is threadable.

Claims 47-64 (Canceled).

65. (New) A method for securing two or more suture strands together, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one fastening element comprised of a shape-recovery material, wherein the element is in a tensioned position for engaging the suture strands while allowing sliding of the element relative to the suture strands, wherein the element comprises an elongate wire, ribbon, rod, filament, shaft, mesh or woven sheet having two or more apertures along its length;

engaging the suture strands with the element, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning the suture strands along a path through at least a portion of the element, wherein positioning includes positioning the suture strands through at least two apertures and positioning the suture strands through the apertures in a stitching fashion; and

transitioning the element to a relaxed shape-recovery position wherein the strands are in a fixed position relative to the element or to each other.

66. (New) A method as in claim 65, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning a first suture strand along a first path and a second suture strand along a second path which differs from the first path.

67. (New) A method as in claim 65, wherein the providing step comprises loading the element on a loading tool.

68. (New) A method as in claim 65, wherein the providing step comprises providing the element loaded on or within a loading tool.

69. (New) A method as in claim 67 or 68, wherein the transitioning step comprises releasing the element from the loading tool.

70. (New) A method as in claim 65, further comprising sliding the element along the suture strands to a desired position prior to the transitioning step.

71. (New) A method as in claim 65, further comprising adjusting the position of the element along the suture strands after the transitioning step.

72. (New) A method for securing two or more suture strands together, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one fastening element comprised of a shape-recovery material, wherein the element is in a tensioned position for engaging the suture strands while allowing sliding of the element relative to the suture strands, wherein the element comprises an elongate wire, ribbon, rod, filament or shaft;

engaging the suture strands with the element; and

transitioning the element to a relaxed shape-recovery position wherein the strands are in a fixed position relative to the element or to each other,

the engaging step comprising positioning the suture strands near at least two elements so that the elements capture the suture strands during the transitioning step by interlocking with each other.

73. (New) A method as in claim 72, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning a first suture strand along a first path and a second suture strand along a second path which differs from the first path.

74. (New) A method as in claim 72, wherein the providing step comprises loading the element on a loading tool.

75. (New) A method as in claim 72, wherein the providing step comprises providing the element loaded on or within a loading tool.

76. (New) A method as in claim 74 or 75, wherein the transitioning step comprises releasing the element from the loading tool.

77. (New) A method as in claim 72, further comprising sliding the element along the suture strands to a desired position prior to the transitioning step.

78. (New) A method as in claim 72, further comprising adjusting the position of the element along the suture strands after the transitioning step.

79. (New) A method for securing two or more suture strands together, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one fastening element comprised of a shape-recovery material, wherein the element is in a tensioned position for engaging the suture strands while allowing sliding of the element relative to the suture strands, wherein the element has a first portion having at least one first aperture and a second portion having at least one second aperture wherein the at least one first aperture is concentrically aligned with at least one second aperture;

engaging the suture strands with the element, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning the suture strands along a path through at least a portion of the element,

wherein positioning comprising positioning the suture strands through at least one first aperture and at least one second aperture and positioning the suture strands through apertures in a stitching fashion; and

transitioning the element to a relaxed shape-recovery position wherein the strands are in a fixed position relative to the element or to each other.

80. (New) A method as in claim 79, wherein the engaging step comprises positioning a first suture strand along a first path and a second suture strand along a second path which differs from the first path.

81. (New) A method as in claim 79, wherein the providing step comprises loading the element on a loading tool.

82. (New) A method as in claim 79, wherein the providing step comprises providing the element loaded on or within a loading tool.

83. (New) A method as in claim 81 or 82, wherein the transitioning step comprises releasing the element from the loading tool.

84. (New) A method as in claim 79, further comprising sliding the element along the suture strands to a desired position prior to the transitioning step.

85. (New) A method as in claim 79, further comprising adjusting the position of the element along the suture strands after the transitioning step.